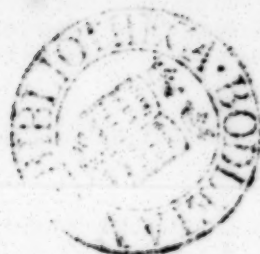


The rev. Abt. Roberts
Savil. Prof. of Geomet.
with the Am. Mus. Comp.

AN
E S S A Y
ON
C O M M E R C E.



Ωμεαν, ὡς περ γενεσις πάντων τέλειται.
Hom. Il. ε'. 246.

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COMMERCE.

COMMERCE appears to have originated by the appointment of the Author of Nature, and in a conformity to his works. The earth, which diversifies her productions according to the numberless differences of soil or climate, bestowing on one country an exuberance, and on others a scarcity, of the necessaries as well as comforts of life: rivers, which facilitate the intercourse between distant parts of the same island or continent; and seas, which afford a means of communication between different lands: the human body, strong, active, and capable of enduring fatigue, but at the same time inadequate to the task of always furnishing sustenance for itself; and the mind, desirous of gain, fond of society, and eager to enlarge its attainments;—these, and many other circumstances may be adduced to prove, that no narrow limits were prescribed by the Creator to the abilities and exertions of man.

But some time must have elapsed, before he could apply these advantages to any practical use:—he must have acquired certain determinate ideas of property, before he could profit by the di-

verfity of the fruits of the earth, before he could exchange his own for the poffeffions of another : he muft have learnt the firft rudiments of the art of Navigation, before he could avail himfelf of the benefits afforded by the Ocean : he muft have proceeded a certain length in Civilization, before he could be enabled to direct the energies of his mind, and to regulate thereby the mechanical operations of his body.

History has recounted the advances gradually made by Commerce in the earlieft ages of the world : it has examined the manner, in which barter, the firft and moft fimple mode of traffic, was fucceeded by the introduction of money ; and has fhewn the progrefs of art, from its rude effays on a raft, or a canoe, till it exhibited proofs of its improvement in the ftructure of the commodious veffel. But notwithstanding the advantages, which flow from Commerce, were remarked at an early period by the inhabitants of Egypt, Phœnicia, Carthage, and moft of the Grecian commonwealths ; and notwithstanding various attempts were accordingly made by them for its extension, their discoveries were confined within very narrow limits. And it may appear furprifing, that although the ancients had early reached fuch perfection in the polite arts, as the moderns have in vain attempted to acquire, nevertheless the Mediterranean, the Ægean, the Euxine, and the Red Seas were, for the moft part, the boundaries of their Commerce. But as Commerce is dependent on Navigation, fo is Navigation on the fciences ; on Astronomy, Geometry, an adequate acquaintance with Mechanics, and a knowledge of the directive faculty of the Loadftone. The arts, the children of the Imagination, haftened to perfection with the livelinefs and the rapidity of their parent : the fciences proceeded with the flow caution of Experience, of which they are the offspring. One of the firft, and perhaps the moft beautiful,

beautiful, among the epic poems of antiquity, is occupied in describing a coasting voyage along the Mediterranean: one of the finest tragedies of antiquity commemorates the most ^asplendid naval action of a maritime people, who ^bthought that Samos was as far from Ægina, as Ægina from the Pillars of Hercules; and the summit of excellence in their respective arts was attained by Sophocles, Phidias, and Apelles, whilst the Carthaginians were penetrating to the Fortunate Islands, and the Phœnicians were advancing with slow and cautious sails to the south-western shores of Britain.

But the want of success, where success is scarcely possible, carries with it no disgrace. The attempt to enlarge these confined limits was worthy of the comprehensive mind of Alexander. Whatever might have been his views with respect to India and Arabia, and whatever obstacles occurred to prevent their accomplishment, Alexandria, which continued to be the centre of Oriental Commerce, and the principal channel of communication between Europe and India till the discovery of the passage round the Cape of Good Hope, still exists an incontestible evidence of the genius and sagacity of its founder.

There was little probability that Commerce, in the cause of which the activity of the Greeks, the perseverance of the Phœnicians, and the power of Alexander had been in vain exerted, should be extended under the laws of Rome, which despised and degraded the profession of a merchant: still less was the probability, when Rome had sunk under the united weight and energy of her north-

^a See the description of the battle of Salamis, in "The Persians" of Æschylus.

^b Herodotus, b. viii.

ern invaders, and when, on the dissolution of the empire, all intercourse was shut up between distant and even contiguous nations. Europe slumbered in torpid insensibility; and although an individual might at intervals arise, although a Charlemagne or an Alfred might burst forth amidst the surrounding gloom, it was not in the power of an individual, however extensive his dominion, however liberal his views, or however enlarged his capacity, to inspire animation and vigour into the lifeless mass. Europe did indeed feel the influence of the abilities of these great men; but it was like the electric shock, which gives a momentary impulse to the human frame, and expires at the instant it is felt.

But society is never found to continue in a state of stagnation: it has its ebbs and flows, its diminutions and increase. The mind, which was sunk into the lowest degradation, was again to exert her faculties, and assert her dominion. Commerce gradually revived: the Italian states, Venice, Florence, Pisa, and Genoa, rose to wealth and power, by establishing with Asia an extensive trade, which was nourished and strengthened by the Crusades: the celebrated Hanseatic League was formed by a number of cities bordering on the Elbe, to secure themselves against the piracies of their less civilized neighbours: while Flanders became the great theatre of Commerce, and the centre of communication.

But hitherto a small part of one hemisphere had set bounds to the ambition and the avarice of man. Nature, by interposing the ocean, seemed to have placed an insurmountable barrier between distant regions. In the Mariner's Compass she furnished man with a guide, by which he has been enabled to penetrate into her inmost recesses, to rifle the treasures and to usurp the dominion of the globe.

For

For Commerce was now destined to move in a new and more enlarged sphere of action. The limits, which confined its progress, vanished before the inventions of Genius, and the perseverance of Courage. The horizon, which before seemed within her grasp, fled as she approached. The prospect widened on all sides; oceans were added to oceans; lands were multiplied on lands; the various parts of the Eastern hemisphere became acquainted with each other; and a new world was opened in the West.

From that period a revolution has taken place in the manners and pursuits of Europe. To the spirit of chivalry and of martial fanaticism, has succeeded the spirit of Commerce: societies have been formed for its encouragement; laws have been instituted for its protection; and palaces have been erected for its residence. Every spring, by which it could be advanced, has been put in motion; and its influence, which has continually increased, is continually and rapidly increasing. No longer an object of doubtful policy, to be cherished or rejected at the election of the Statesman, it is become necessary to every country, which aims at wealth and dominion: no longer confined to a few distinct regions, it directs the councils of Europe, and regulates the balance of the world.

From thus tracing the progress of Commerce, and observing the degree of importance, to which it has attained, we may proceed to consider those circumstances, which appear favourable to its establishment, and those effects, which attend it, as they contribute to the happiness or the misery of mankind.

Of those CAUSES, which appear favourable to the establishment of Commerce, some are the gifts of nature, others the effect of art: some are local and accidental, others arise from civil and political institutions.

If

If we contemplate the map of the world, we shall observe a similarity of SITUATION in those countries, which have been most generally distinguished in the history of trade. The inhabitants of the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean and the Ægean were the first and most celebrated adventurers in the ancient world; the inhabitants of the coasts and islands of the German Ocean, and of the Gulfs of Venice and Genoa, were their first and most celebrated imitators in the modern. Possessed for the most part of few natural productions, they depended on external means of support: masters of a long line of sea-coast, indented with bays, sheltered by promontories, and intersected with rivers, they enjoyed opportunities of transporting the produce of different countries from one part of the world to another: while industry, activity and perseverance, supplied the deficiency of a more fertile soil, or a more genial climate. On the other hand, the most fertile soil, the most genial climate, or the most active and enterprising minds, have not been able to produce any commercial intercourse with the interior parts of Africa, or those immense tracts both in Europe and Asia which lie northward of the Caspian Sea. The necessity of such means of communication was perceived by the penetrating genius of Charlemagne^c, who, in the darkest ages of Europe, conceived the noble project of uniting the Rhine and the Danube, and thereby opening an intercourse between the German Ocean and the Euxine. The no less penetrating genius of ^dPeter the Great impelled him to the execution of similar projects; and the artificial junction of the Volga and the Ladoga Lake, by which he proposed to unite the Caspian and the Baltic, has introduced Commerce into those parts of Russia which lie contiguous to its passage.

There may be indeed, and there have existed, certain causes, ca-

^c Pütter's Germanic Empire, vol. ii.

^d Life of Catherine II. Preliminary Discourse.

pable of opening a source of considerable trade without these advantages of situation. Such was the circumstance of a ^e fertile spot in the midst of an inhospitable desert, which gave birth to the commercial importance of ancient Palmyra ; such is the circumstance of the ^f injunction laid by Mahomet on his followers, to visit once during their lives the Temple of Mecca, which gives occasion to annual caravans over the Arabian Desert, and supports an extensive traffic between Egypt, Turkey, and the East. But the glory of Palmyra was as transitory, as the example is singular ; and the want of navigable rivers in the latter instance is supplied by an animal peculiar to that part of the world, and emphatically styled by the Arabians, ^g “ The Ship of the Desert.”

But whatever may be the natural advantages enjoyed by a country, they are not of themselves sufficient for the support of trade ; and FREEDOM, which supplies the want of many local or accidental circumstances, can be adequately supplied by none. The commercial career of ancient Egypt was checked by religious restrictions : despotism has repressed the energy of the Greeks ; and slavery, civil and ecclesiastical, is among the principal causes which have prevented, and still continue to prevent, Spain and Portugal from deriving any proportional advantage from their possessions in the Indies. On the contrary, Liberty, by opening an asylum to the fugitives of oppression, laid the foundation of the Italian commonwealths, raised in Holland a rampire against the encroachments of the ocean, and rescued an empire from his dominion. Many writers have indeed gone so far as to assert, that the establishment of exclusive companies, a measure so salutary to the weak and infant state of commerce

^e See Campbell's Political Survey, vol. i. p. 273.

^f Robertson on India, 186, and 400, 8vo.

^g Ibid.

at its revival in the middle ages, has been injurious to its growth in the present condition of the world: and the examples of ^h Holland, perhaps the wealthiest country in Europe; of ⁱ Spain, who has increased in opulence since the removal of certain exclusive privileges; and of ^k Europe at large, who, notwithstanding many natural advantages on the side of India, has derived less benefit from her commerce with the East, than from that with America; have been cited to prove that the more open the port, the more extensive and more productive will be its trade. Thus much however we may safely advance: If the Government encourages the individual, or at least does not molest him, in the enjoyment of the fruits of his exertions, his exertions will be proportionally great; the man of birth, of fortune, and of respectability, will embark in trade; and the haughty senator of Venice, or the elegant citizen of Athens or of Florence, will not blush at the title of Merchant. If trade is obstructed by difficulties, or its followers treated with contempt, it will entirely languish, as under the laws of ancient Rome; or will be practised by the lowest orders of society, as the Jews under the feudal system, or by men of desperate fortunes, as the Portuguese adventurers in Asia, and the Spanish in America and the West Indies.

In directing our attention to the EFFECTS of Commerce, the first and most obvious is its TENDENCY TO CIVILIZE MANKIND. The ferocity and savageness of several of the Spanish nations of antiquity were attributed to their having no intercourse with strangers: to the same cause may be attributed the barbarism of Europe in the feudal ages. The most commercial nations have indeed in all

^h See Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii.

ⁱ See Robertson's America, vol. ii. 4to.

^k See Smith, vol. ii.

ages of the world led the way, and made the farthest progress in civilization ; while, on the other hand, all the inland parts of Africa, and several of the most northerly tracts of Europe and Asia, have continued from the first foundation of the world in the same uninterrupted state of seclusion and ignorance. Man is formed for society, and for intercourse with man : in his savage and unsocial state he exhibits a mind narrowed by ignorance and debased by prejudice ; by degrees he discovers that he can derive assistance from the good offices of others, and by a return can contribute to their support : thus his faculties expand, and his heart is enlarged ; he becomes mild, useful, and benevolent ; the consciousness of mutual dependence produces mutual regard ; and self-interest is the first link in the golden chain which binds society together.

The influence of mutual intercourse, which thus operates on individuals, when more widely extended, in a similar manner effects the ABOLITION of NATIONAL PREJUDICES, and gives a SOFTNESS to the NATIONAL CHARACTER. In the former case it inspires man with a regard for his neighbour, and a love for his country : in the latter, without dissolving these more immediate ties, it makes him a friend of mankind and a citizen of the world. While the Jews were indulging in seclusion their antipathy to strangers, the Phœnicians were spreading their improvements through the surrounding coasts :—while the modern Chinese is enjoying the fruits of his own country in selfish and sullen gratification, the European is exerting his abilities to increase the comforts and alleviate the distresses of mankind.

The mind, too, thus prepared by intercourse, is best qualified to
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adopt and profit by the inventions of others, and to strike out into new paths of improvement.

AGRICULTURE, though anterior in origin to Commerce, has derived from it many important advantages, and in some degree depends on it for support. The landholder, who has no means of disposing of the superfluous produce of his land, will not be desirous of raising more than sufficient for the sustenance of himself and his dependents; and in whatever state of barbarous magnificence he may thus be enabled to live, around him he will contemplate a barren and inhospitable domain, and a peasantry sunk into the lowest misery and indigence. But when he becomes sensible that his exertions will not be fruitless, a regard to his own interest will impel him to the cultivation of his ground: the marsh will be drained, and the forest will be cleared; his meadows will teem with cattle, his valleys will wave with corn, and his orchards will blush with fruitage. The ^mmerchant, likewise, whose ambition frequently leads him to become the proprietor of land, contributes in no small degree to the advancement of agriculture: for from being accustomed to employ his money in advantageous projects, he is fond of undertaking works of improvement; and, from his habits of order, attention, and oeconomy, he is best qualified to execute them with profit and success. By the operation of these causes, a change was introduced in the appearance of Europe at the revival of Commerce; and ^aFlanders, which has before been mentioned as the centre of traffic, presented the fair prospect of the best cultivated country of the age.

^l Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. p. 117.

^m Id. 118.

^a Mickle's History of the Discovery of India; prefixed to the Lusiad, 32.

Nor is it only by encouraging the culture of indigenous productions that Commerce has been thus beneficial to Agriculture: by the transplantation of exotics she diversifies the productions of nature, and gives thereby to man additional incentives to diligence, and additional objects of enjoyment. Hence different countries are no longer * characterized by their exclusive productions, but reciprocally adopt the productions of each other: thus the † citron of Media shed its uninterrupted succession of fruits and diffused its salutary fragrance amidst the groves of Italy; thus the sugar-cane of Asia has flourished in most of the southern provinces of Europe, and has thence been transplanted to the West Indies; and thus the vine of Portugal has succeeded to the barren and unprofitable forests of the Madeiras.

But notwithstanding the support thus derived to Agriculture, the country which depends on its own produce alone for subsistence, is still subject to an evil, which all the powers of husbandry cannot prevent, and which nothing but ‡ trade can remedy. The occasional failure of a harvest has been known to spread the horrors of famine over ancient Egypt, over some of the richest countries of modern Europe, and over the fertile and populous plains of Bengal. But we have reason to hope that mankind will never again be visited by so afflicting a calamity; and that if the source of subsistence should be dried up in one country, Commerce will open to it fresh channels of supply from another.

As Commerce thus furnishes mankind with additional means of support, it likewise greatly promotes their comfort and convenience,

* “*Divisæ arboribus patriæ.*” Virg. Georg. ii.

† See the description of this tree, b. xii. chap. 3. of Pliny’s Nat. Hist.

‡ See Mickle, 184.

by the encouragement of MANUFACTURES and the USEFUL ARTS. For such is the impulse given by Commerce to the mechanic Arts, and such are the advantages arising from the practice of them, that, in the hands of a mercantile and industrious people, the ' wool and iron of their native lands become more valuable than the gold and jewels of India; and the plough, the spinning-wheel, and the loom, by increasing the means of employment and subsistence, promote the POPULATION, give VIGOUR to the ACTIVITY, and thereby add to the real wealth, strength, and happiness of a nation.

For notwithstanding the too great justice of the complaint, of the number of lives continually lost in navigation and manufactures, we shall find, on estimating the aggregate, that the most commercial countries are in general the most populous. Whence originated those numerous colonies which issued from Phœnicia and Greece? Whence those no less numerous tribes which throng the towns and the fleets of Holland? It is true, that in the ' United States of America, the increase of inhabitants is infinitely greater than in any state of Europe: but the rapidity and extent of the increase arise from causes of a distinct and peculiar nature; and the population of that country, when compared with its dimensions, still falls very far short of that of the commercial countries in Europe. It is likewise true, that the produce of the lands in China, though cultivated in the highest degree, is insufficient for the sustenance of the people. But in such a case population becomes a burden instead of a support; a curse, instead of a blessing. Why will a civilized, and in some respects an enlightened nation, legalize the murder of children, rather than secure life and comfort to thousands of her miserable natives by the introduction of the blessings of Commerce?

' Hume's Essay on Commerce.

' Smith, i. 106.

In addition also to the means of subsistence, which it supplies, Commerce opens a passage to those active members, whom the most fertile and best-cultivated country may sometimes be unable to support; and to those wild and turbulent spirits, which the best constituted government cannot always content. Nor is any danger to be apprehended by the parent state from such emigrations, which not only relieve her from the necessity of supporting useless and burthenome bodies of men; but, by affording a new channel for the exportation of her domestic manufactures, contribute to the encouragement of her domestic industry, and in consequence to the establishment of her POWER. It has indeed been objected, that those thousand small and almost imperceptible threads, which bind the husbandman to his native soil, are torn asunder by the desultory operations of trade. But when the enjoyments and comforts, arising from this source, are suffered to flow in a regular and uninterrupted stream, there is little probability, that the industrious and wealthy merchant will be induced to change the certainty of advantage in his own country, for the ideal prospect of greater profits in another. In the mean time a middle rank is formed in society, superior to the abject condition of the mere peasant; and with the diffusion of the conveniences of life, zeal in their defence and preservation is proportionally diffused. The body too, and the mind, which must necessarily be exercised in the employments of peace, are thus prepared and fortified to meet the difficulties of war. The sailor, who has traversed the ocean in pursuit of wealth, thence acquires skill and perseverance to contend with the enemies of his country: the mind, which has been accustomed to calculate the remote contingencies of Commerce, may thereby be enabled to comprehend the relative bearings and dependences of countries, and to penetrate into the mazes of politics. Thus, by a concurrence of circumstances, the theory and practice of military skill are alike promoted. The operations

tions of trade tend to procure the mastery of the sea; and it was the opinion of * Themistocles and of Cicero, an opinion founded on reason, and justified by experience, that to be master of the sea is to be master of the world.

To the same cause mankind have been, and still continue to be, indebted for those ARTS and SCIENCES, which add elegance as well as comfort to life; which render power respectable; and which dignify and exalt, at the same time that they refine and embellish, the mind.

The respective faculties of different men are not perhaps distinguished from each other by so marked a line as has been frequently imagined: the capability of improvement is innate in most men; actual improvement depends much on external causes. The germ, which has slept through the winter in the parent stock, is drawn forth and matured by the genial showers of spring and the warm sun of summer: the spark, which no unassisted power of the flint or the steel can emit, is produced only by collision. Similar causes, acting on the minds of men, produce similar effects. Commerce, by supplying a numerous part of society with the necessaries and conveniences of life without any manual exertion, leaves them at liberty to cultivate the polite arts; and, by enabling the opulent to hold out ample encouragement to the man of genius, gives birth to emulation and perseverance. Manifold indeed, and incalculable, are the advantages, which learning and the arts have derived from the inventions and improvements of commercial nations. To a nation of "merchants the ancient world was indebted, if not for the origin, at least for the diffusion of the use of letters:—to a nation

* Book x. Epist. 8. to Atticus.

" The Phœnicians.

of ^a merchants the modern world is little less indebted, if not for the invention, at least for the first introduction and earliest improvements in the manufacture of paper and in the art of printing. The commercial commonwealths of Greece were the first to encourage, to reduce to established rules, and to carry to perfection, the arts of poetry, painting, and sculpture: the commercial commonwealths of Italy and of Flanders were the first to promote them at their revival, and to give perpetuity and circulation to their works, by the discovery of new ^y arts. From ^z the ruins of the Byzantine libraries, and from the darkest monasteries of Germany and Britain, a ^a merchant of Florence collected the long-forgotten works of the writers of antiquity, and added value to the collection by importations from Alexandria and Greece. A ^b lineal descendant of the same merchant instituted in his native city a school for the study of the antique, was the munificent patron of learning and of genius, was, in a word, the friend of Michael Angelo. A son of the latter followed in the same glorious career, and by his exertions in the cause of the arts gave such celebrity to the age, in which he lived, as entitled it to rank with those of Pericles, Ptolemy, and Augustus.

For a reason, which in tracing the progress of Commerce we have already had occasion to remark, the sciences never arrived at any considerable excellence among the ancients: a certain acquaintance with some of them was indeed necessary to navigation; and these accordingly were most cultivated and advanced in Phoenicia and Greece. Modern enquiries in the same cause have been attended with greater success; and Commerce, which promoted the researches of genius, has been rewarded with every advantage which

^a The Florentines.

^y Particularly engraving.

^z See Gibbon's History, vol. vi. 4to.

^a Cosmo de Medici.

^b Lorenzo de Medici. See his Life by Roscoe, vol. ii. p. 200, and following.

it is in the power of Philosophy to bestow. Nor have the improvements, introduced by Commerce, been confined to those sciences, on which it is dependent, but are extended to others, whose connection with it is less the effect of necessity than of the liberal spirit, to which it has given birth. In consequence of so wide a field having been opened to curiosity, natural history has been investigated and explained in all its various branches: medicine has not only been improved as a science, but derives some of its most valuable and efficacious aids from foreign productions, such as the opium of India, and the balsam and bark of Peru:—and our holy Religion, if we may consider it as a subject of scientific enquiry, has been illustrated and confirmed by arguments, which nothing but the most extensive intercourse could have supplied. Even the vain efforts of avarice, and the speculations of false philosophy, have accidentally been promotive of real science, and of course beneficial to mankind. The labour, which has been exerted for the attainment of the precious metals, has been the cause of various discoveries in mineralogy; and chemistry is indebted for some of its most valuable acquisitions to the search for the philosopher's stone.

That a country, whose views are merely commercial, whose sole object is the accumulation of wealth, and who appreciates every acquisition by its pecuniary value—that such a country should take the lead in liberal pursuits is not to be expected: it is not to be expected that the Carthaginian should excel in learning, or the Dutchman in taste. But, in estimating the consequences of Commerce, we are called on to take a more general view; and that excellence in the arts and sciences is the exclusive effect of a liberal and extensive intercourse, is proved by the sure and undeniable test of experience. What, we may ask, are the causes of the present condition of the Chinese, who, notwithstanding their universal practice,

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tice of agriculture, and a most active internal trade; notwithstanding their acknowledged industry and sagacity, have continued for a long series of ages in the same state of mental stagnation, and exhibit the singular phenomenon of a polite and learned people, unacquainted with the first principles of drawing, and 'ignorant of the use of an alphabet? What was the condition of ancient Rome during the first five centuries of her existence? Rough, hardy, and almost uncivilized, she disdained the profession, for she knew not or despised the advantages, of Commerce. Into those countries, which she colonized, as well as into those, which she conquered, she carried not the arts of refinement, for she possessed them not; from those countries, which already possessed them, she was sometimes the cause of their being banished. In the mean time, Greece was making improvements at home, and disseminating them together with her colonies through the coasts of Europe and Asia; and when in the course of time she yielded her independence to the superior power of Rome, her submission was followed by a more glorious triumph over her conqueror—the triumph of the gifts of Commerce, of learning, of elegance, and of the arts, over rustic ignorance and military ferocity.

And hence naturally arises a question concerning the truth of the remark, that the arts of refinement are the parents of effeminacy, and that a commercial nation speeds to dissolution with the same haste, with which it attains to empire. Together with a love of learning and of the arts, a milder and more equable spirit enters into the mind; but if they soften that impetuous boldness, which characterizes the savage, they substitute a steady, rational, and dignified courage more worthy of a man; such a courage as prompted

* Mickle's Introduction to the *Lusiad*, p. 13.

the well-known * reply of Themistocles, and checked, whilst it exposed, the rashness of his rival. Firm on this basis, which no external force can overthrow, stands the pillar of national power: but if corruption secretly undermine it; if an excess of refinement in the arts produce a degeneracy of manners (for while the arts retain their dignity, the manners never will degenerate); if luxury enervate the minds of the nobility, enervate the sinews of the people, render money, and not merit, the passport to authority, and, instead of the strong and natural support of native valour, substitute the weak and inefficient prop of mercenary aid: of such a state, however extensive may be its Commerce, however ample its revenue, the ruin is inevitable. But it might be difficult to shew that the power arising from Trade has been upon the whole less permanent than that, which has proceeded from any other cause. Athens, who was nearly contemporary in her establishment, was nearly coeval in her duration, with Sparta: Tyre, whose power had stood through ages, was able in the end to resist, and almost to repel, the attacks of Alexander: and even Carthage, who had already passed the acme of her prosperity, who was distracted by internal factions, and whose cause was fought by mercenary troops, after many a glorious, though ineffectual struggle, sunk not but before the more vigorous and progressive energy of Rome. Nor is an argument to the contrary to be drawn from the degradation of Venice or of Spain, if a distinction be allowed between necessary and accidental consequences, between those effects which are inherent in the nature of things, and those which result from contingencies. The overthrow of Venice was begun by a ^d combination, which scarcely any human power could have resisted; it was completed by a ^e discovery, which no human wisdom could have foreseen, no human prudence could have

* "Strike, but hear me."

^d The League of Cambray.

^e Of the passage round the Cape of Good Hope.

prevented.

prevented. ' Spain was never in possession of those advantages, which spring from a steady and permanent Commerce. Instead of establishing a regular system of trade, she grasped at the power and revenue of sovereignty ; instead of encouraging domestic industry, she drained her blood and wasted her vigour in the working of foreign mines ; instead of giving security to property, she shackled the exertions of useful labour by harsh and ill-judged restraints.

But the influence of well-regulated Commerce appears perhaps most important when considered in its relation to GOVERNMENT ; for having received from liberty its strongest and most effectual impulse, it re-acts with equal force ; as the blood, which circulates through the human frame, still returns to the heart, the fountain and reservoir of the whole. The overthrow of the feudal system was a natural consequence of the liberal diffusion of trade ; and in the spirit of active enquiry, which proceeded from the same cause, may be found the source of that irresistible stream, which overwhelmed the usurpations of papal Rome, and spread the blessings of religious liberty over many of the countries of Europe.

But whatever may have been the advantages enjoyed by Europe, very different consequences have been felt by the natives of those countries, from the discovery of which such advantages have in a great measure arisen. Immersed in barbarism, or debased by servitude, to them the virtues, the decencies, and the charities of civil life are little known : benighted in the darkness of superstition, on them the day-spring of Christianity hath not dawned. Whether their minds may at length expand under the influence of general intercourse ; whether by becoming gradually more informed, they

' See Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. ii. p. 230. and Robertson's America, vol. ii. p. 395, and 391. 4to.

may attain a proportional degree of power; and, by being thus enabled to contend with their oppressors for mastery, may elevate themselves to the same high rank with civilized and enlightened Europe: of these events the prospect is too clouded and obscure to be discerned by the limited faculties of man. In the mean time (such are the abuses, from which no human institution can be exempt, and to which Commerce is peculiarly subject) the advantages, which they experience, are precarious and trifling; unhappily, the evils, which they have suffered, are palpable and cannot be doubted. For from the period when rapacity and perfidiousness succeeded to the humane and exalted policy of Albuquerque; from the period when the blood-hounds of war were let slip on the unoffending empires of Mexico and Peru; history presents us with a melancholy picture, from the contemplation of which human nature starts back with anguish; and in which if the fair characters of a Nunio or a Gasca be sometimes delineated, they remind us of those spots of beauty and fertility in the Arabian Desert, which sooth the senses of the wearied traveller amidst scenes of horror and despair. From those periods, Asia has groaned beneath the lash of tyrants, who have imitated the boldness, without remembering the magnanimity, of de Gama; America has bled throughout her continent; her islands have been depopulated and laid waste; and Africa has been drained of untold innumerable millions, to supply victims for the oppression, consequent on the discoveries of Columbus. * Well might the genius of the Atlantic or the Southern Ocean be represented as starting from his primæval slumber, and denouncing vengeance on the usurpers of his ancient and hereditary domain!

What then, and whence, are the causes, which have thus black-

* See the sublime description of the Spirit of the Cape, b. v. of Mickle's Translation of the Lusiad. "I spoke, when rising, &c."

ened the human mind? What are the causes which have prevented the diffusion of those blessings, which Commerce imparted to Europe, and might have been expected to disseminate throughout the world? What, above all, as more iniquitous and more detestable than all, are the causes of that law, by which Europe lays claim to the freeborn native of Africa? that law, by which every bar of religious and moral duty is broken down; by which man, the image of his Creator, is made an article of traffic, and the fair robe of honourable Commerce is blurred with the tears and with the life-blood of millions?—They are to be found in the passions and vices of man: in those passions and vices, to which Commerce itself gives life and vigour! They are to be found in that lust and avarice of gain, by whose infectious touch the sanctity of Religion and the purity of Morality are polluted; in the thunder of whose voice the still small whisper of human kindness is swallowed up and lost! *Punica fides*, and *Punicum ingenium*, were proverbial expressions among the ancient Romans: meanness, baseness, and dishonesty, are said to characterize the conquerors of Philip and of Lewis. Actuated by the same fatal desire, the Heathen has broken the oath, which he had sworn at the altar of his God; the Christian has trodden on the Cross, and renounced the religion of his Saviour. Mammon is described by our divine Poet^a, as,

“ the least erected spirit, that fell
From heav’n; for ev’n in heav’n his looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent; admiring more
The riches of heav’n’s pavement, trodden gold,
Than ought divine or holy else enjoy’d
In vision beatific.”

With satisfaction then, mingled with regret at the occasional deformity of the human mind, do we contemplate the honourable

^a *Paradise Lost*, b. i.

and perhaps unexampled character of the British Merchant, not more distinguished for industry and diligence in the occupations of trade, than for virtue, knowledge, and humanity. And with satisfaction, such as the prospect of disinterested beneficence must inspire, do we behold a Company of private Individuals, earnestly employed in the plantation of a free and peaceful colony; enriching it with the blessings of civilization, industry, and knowledge; and cheering it with the joyful light of Christianity. May the opening prospect of happiness be extended and improved! In the mean time let us hail it as anⁱ “omen of the overthrow of that cruel system, which as yet prevails in Africa, and of an approaching change in the general condition of that hitherto unhappy continent!”

Thus have we traced the RISE, PROGRESS, DECLINE, and REVIVAL of Commerce, till its final and permanent establishment in most of the European nations; we have touched on the principal CAUSES, which appear conducive to its support; and have more minutely examined, as being of a more interesting and important nature, the EFFECTS, which are produced by it on nations and individuals. By the extensive intercourse, which it opens between the different parts of the world; by the spirit of liberal enquiry, which it promotes; and by the means of encouragement, which it furnishes to the Arts and Sciences, it has appeared to have an obvious tendency to civilize, to instruct, and to polish mankind; nor must it be forgotten, that, when indulged to excess, it has a no less obvious tendency to contract the feelings, and to corrupt the morals, of those, who are devoted to its pursuit:—and if national prosperity be an aggregate of individual happiness, and public of private vir-

ⁱ See the Report of the Sierra Leone Company, p. 161.

tue; if a nation be enviable, accordingly as its members enjoy a greater or less degree of domestic comfort; and respectable, accordingly as they exhibit a greater or less regard to Religion and Morality; small will be the claim advanced by Commerce to the gratitude of that people, who shall make it the exclusive object of their attention. But as an accessory indeed, and as a mean, by which the projects of a nobler and more elevated spirit may be executed, it is deserving of every support, which the wisdom and the authority of any government can confer. Under the influence of such a spirit, our own country enjoys all the benefits, and suffers under few of the evils, which attend on a most extensive trade. Blest with every advantage, which Nature can furnish and Art improve, she beholds Commerce pouring into her bosom the full horn of plenty; sees under its still-increasing operations, her long-barren and inhospitable tracts smile with culture, and teem with population; sees it diffusing around every comfort, which can endear society, cherishing every discovery, which can embellish or improve the mind, and giving scope to every virtue, which can humanize and dignify the heart.

Commerce, thus restricted in its operation by fixed and honest principles, becomes not only a cause of private opulence and splendor, but the parent of national prosperity, and the support of national virtue. Its unexhausted treasures supply a never-failing resource in the time of public danger; a resource, to which we owe our present proud pre-eminence over the other countries of prostrate and, but for us, of subjugated Europe; to which we owe the preservation of every thing most dear to us, of our domestic comfort, and our public security; our Laws, our Independence, and our Religion.

OXFORD,
June 5, 1799.

RICHARD MANT, A. B.
ORIEL COLLEGE.

